

Caution! Micromanagers may be lightning rods for lawsuits

Some supervisors who micromanage tend to focus on one or two troublesome employees. If those employees belong to a protected class, watch out!

Here's how such cases wind up in court: The micromanaged employee will track every interaction she has with her supervisor—and the interactions that supervisor has with others who don't belong to her protected class. She's trying to build her case if she ends up being fired.

Meanwhile, the micromanager gets increasingly aggravated, reading the employee's actions as insubordination. The boss continues to build a case against the employee, noting every minor mistake. Of course, the employee is tracking her co-workers' minor mistakes too, taking note of the differences.

When the employee is ultimately fired, she sues, alleging she was micromanaged because of her race, sex or other protected characteristic. That's when she tells the jury about all the times she was singled out for criticism when her co-workers got a pass.

Recent case: Shravanti Reddy, who is of Indian descent, went to work for The Salvation Army and almost immediately started having trouble with her supervisor.

Reddy started tracking when her white co-worker was criticized for mistakes and comparing that to her own experiences. Reddy claimed she was constantly harangued about minor grammatical mistakes, while her officemate was not. Finally, Reddy was fired for supposed insubordination when she refused to prepare a memo.

Reddy sued, alleging that her former supervisor had built a case against her because of her national origin. She said the supposed insubordination charge was just an excuse to cover up discrimination.

The court said a jury should decide whether the reason Reddy was fired was insubordination or discrimination. It will consider all the times that Reddy was criticized when her officemate was not. (*Reddy v. The Salvation Army*, No. 06-Civ-5176, SD NY, 2008)